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Bush Says CIA Disclosures Have Damaged Foreign Ties

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Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) Director George Bush said here Friday that recent disclosures about U.S. intelligence operations have damaged his agency's friendly relationship with intelligence services in other countries.

Secret agents in Latin America, Africa, the Mideast and Eastern Europe "are holding back intelligence information they used to give us because of the risk they will be exposed to in the United States," said Bush. "They simply don't trust us anymore."

Bush spoke at the 90th annual meeting of the Greater Houston Area YMCA Friday night at the Rice Rittenhouse Hotel. About 500 members of 20 local YMCA branches honored the top volunteers of 1975.

Bush said that "the CIA has taken a tremendous battering" in the past year that has hurt its image both at home and abroad. "People are frightened about what we do," he said. "But we're just plain citizens that go about life without always sneaking around spying on people."

Bush said recent reports of past CIA activities singled out "peculiar aberrations" and "sensationalized" them. He agreed that foreign operations, such as the attempted sabotage of Fidel Castro's beard and CIA domestic spying were wrong, but said that those "mistakes" have been corrected.

"There are some grubby things we have to do but not many," said Bush. "And the public never hears about our successes."

Bush said the public is slowly beginning to realize the importance of the CIA despite the recent Congressional criticism of his agency. "The pendulum is starting to swing back in favor of us," he said.

A Senate Select Committee headed by Sen. Frank Church handed down a comprehensive study of the CIA last week illustrating certain past covert operations that the committee said violated constitutional rights and wasted taxpayers' money. The committee also outlined 183 recommendations for changing the CIA and suggested that a special Senate panel oversee CIA operations in the future.

Bush said Friday that he agrees with some of the committee's recommended changes but does not favor creation of the oversight panel.